

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9257
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AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

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USEEC

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, EI
SUBJECT: IRISH ELECTION, WHY SUCH A SWING?

REF: (A) DUBLIN 1403, (B) DUBLIN 1326

SUMMARY: WITH THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT, WE EXPLAIN THE MASSIVE DEFEAT OF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT BY (A) THE PEOPLE BLAMED THE COALITION FOR ECONOMIC HARDSHIP, AND (B) THE FIANNA FAIL RAN A CLEVER CENTRALIZED CAMPAIGN FOCUSED ON THE POPULAR FIGURE OF PARTY LEADER JACK LYNCH. THE MASSIVE SWING TO FIANNA FAIL DOES APPEAR TO HAVE OCCURRED VERY LATE, STARTING JUST WEEKS BEFORE THE ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

1. THE FINAL TALLY OF THE JUNE 16TH IRISH ELECTION WAS FIANNA FAIL 84 SEATS, FINE GAEL 43, LABOR 17, INDEPENDENT 4. THE NEW FIANNA FAIL GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE A MAJORITY
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OF TWENTY. THIS COMPARES TO THE LAST ELECTION, 1973, IN WHICH FIANNA FAIL HAD ONLY 69 AND LOST TO THE FINE GAEL (54) AND LABOR (19) COALITION. IT IS A SMASHING, UNPRE- DENTED VICTORY, AND WAS THE LARGEST VOTER SWING BETWEEN ELECTIONS IN THE HISTORY OF THE REPUBLIC. THE SHIFT WAS ABOUT 7 PERCENT, GIVING FIANNAMAIL ABOUT 52 PERCENT OF THE FIRST PREFERENCE VOTES. THE VOTER TURNOUT WAS A NORMAL 75 PERCENT.

2. ALL BUT ONE OF THE MAJOR POLITICAL COMMENTATORS HAD PREDICTED A COALITION VICTORY. BRIAN FARREL, THE QUOTE MR. NEWS UNQUOTE OF PNISH TELEVISION (AND ANCHORMAN OF THE TV ELECTION COVERAGE), ALONE HAD PREDICTED A NARROW FIANNA FAIL VICTORY. ALTHOUGH WE HEDGED OUR BETS (REF B) WE GENERALLY WENT ALONG WITH THE ACCEPTED WISDOM THAT IT WOULD BE A CLOSE ELECTION WHICH COULD TIP EITHER WAY. SO MUCH FOR THE EXPERTS. WHAT NONE KNEW WAS THAT AN IRISH MARKETING SURVEY POLL, COMPLETED JUST PRIOR TO THE ELECTION FOR FIANNA FAIL, HAD ACCURATELY GUAGED THE SWING, BUT IT WAS KEPT SECRET BY THE PARTY IN ORDER TO PREVENT ANY SLIPPAGE FROM OVERCONFIDENCE. ONLY LYNCH AND A HANDFUL KNEW ABOUT THE POLL AND THEY WERE SKEPTICAL. WHEN LYNCH PREDICTED 77 SEATS FOR FIANNA FAIL HE WAS OPENLY DERIDED AS WILDLY OVEROPTIMISTIC. HOW, THEN, DO WE ACCOUNT FOR THIS SURPRISE?

3. WITH THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT IT IS POSSIBLE TO RE-CONSTRUCT SOME OF THE REASONS FOR THIS ELECTORAL EARTHQUAKE, THOUGH ALL ARE NOT AGREED UPON WHAT WEIGHT TO GIVE TO THE VARIOUS FACTORS. POLITICAL SCIENTIST MAURICE MANNING HAS IDENTIFIED A NEW QUOTE VOLATILE UNQUOTE ELEMENT IN THE ELECTORATE, PERHAPS AS HIGH AS 25 PERCENT, WHICH DOES NOT VOTE IN TRADITIONAL IRISH PATTERNS (VOTERS HAVE HEREFORE BEEN VERY CONSERVATIVE, AND 2 PERCENT SWINGS WERE CON-

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SIDERED LARGE). IT IS THUS MANIPULABLE BY POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SHORT-RANGE FACTORS. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE MAJOR FACTORS IN THIS ELECTION WERE INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT, ALONG WITH OTHER SUBSIDIARY ECONOMIC FACTORS, SUCH AS FARMER TAXATION. UNEMPLOYMENT WAS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT TO THE 20 PERCENT FIRST-TIME VOTERS. THE COALITION, AGAIN BY HINDSIGHT, MADE THE MISTAKE OF CONCLUDINT THAT PEOPLE WOULD BLAME ABSTRACT EXTERNAL FACTORS FOR THE ECONOMIC WOES AND ACCEPT THE ASSURANCES THAT THINGS ARE GETTING BETTER (ACTUALLY, TO THE AVERAGE VOTER POCKET-BOOK THERE IS LITTLE INDICATION THAT THINGS ARE GETTING BETTER). THE COALITION WERE SOMEWHAT COMPLACENT AS THEY HAD WON THREE OF FOUR BYELECTIONS RECENTLY AND THE MAJOR PUBLICIZED SPRING POLLS INDICATED A COMFORTABLE COALITION MARGIN. THE POLLSTERS, HOWEVER, DID DETECT THE VERY LATE SWING OF THIS QUOTE VOLATILE UNQUOTE ELEMENT, BUT BY THE TIME THE SHREWDER HEADS IN THE COALITION REALIZED WHAT HAD HAPPENED IT WAS TOO LATE TO CHANGE TACTICS. FROM WHAT HE HAS BEEN SAYING ON MANY INTER-VIEWS AFTER THE FACT, IT IS CLEAR THAT OUTGOING FOREIGN MINISTER GARRET FITZGERALD BECAME AWARE OF THE DIRE SITUATION JUST BEFORE THE ELECTION.

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4. THE SATURDAY MORNING QUARTERBACKS ARE ALSO FACTOR-
ING THE POSITIVE, I.E. JACK LYNCH AND A WELL CON-
CEIVED AND EXECUTED ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN BY FIANNA FAIL.
BY COMPARISON WITH COSGRAVE, LYNCH IS VERY POPULAR.
HE IS A KIND OF UNCLE-FATHER FIGURE WHO INSPIRES CON-
SIDERABLE RESPECT AND TRUST. APPARENTLY HIS POPULARITY
HAS GROWN DURING THE QUOTE OUT UNQUOTE YEARS (1973-77),
JUDGING BY THE GENUINELY ENTHUSIASTIC CROWDS WHICH
GREETED HIM DURING THE CAMPAIGN. TAOISEACH LIAM COSGRAVE,
ON THE OTHER HAND, WITH HIS DOUR AND IFFIDENT MANNER,
ALTHOUGH RESPECTED, DOES NOT ENJOY MUCH PERSONNAL
POPULARITY AND IS CERTAINLY NOT A LOVABLE TYPE POLITICIAN.
LATELY HE HAS BEEN GETTING A RATHER HARD IMAGE AS A STERN
LAW-AND-ORDER MAN, ESPECIALLY AFTER AN UNSCRIPTED SPEECH
AT THE RECENT FINE GAEIL CONVENTION IN WHICH HE FLAYED
UNMERCIFULLY ANYONE WHO DISAGREED WITH HIM, PARTICULARLY
THE IRISH TIMES AND QUOTE BLOW-IN UNQUOTE JOURNALISTS
(I.E. THE JOURNALISTS WHO ANALYZE IRELAND AFTER A TWO
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DAY VISIT). AS IT TURNED OUT COSGRAVE WAS CONSISTENTLY ATTACKED IN THE PRESS DURING THE CAMPAIGN AS LYNCH WAS CONSISTENTLY PRAISED, A NOT INCONSIDERABLE FACTOR.

5. IN A PRIVATE DISCUSSION WITH THE POLITICAL OFFICER AFTER THE ELECTION, FIANNA FAIL GENERAL SECRETARY SEAMUS BRENNAN OUTLINED HIS ELECTION STRATEGY. HE WAS THE PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT OF THIS VICTORY. AS A REWARD BRENNAN (29), WILL BE ELEVATED TO THE SENATE ON JULY 5. HE SAID THAT THE FIRST BIG THING WAS A SYSTEMATIC EFFORT TO REORGANIZE THE PARTY UP AND DOWN THE COUNTRY, STARTING IN 1974. THIS WAS DONE WELL. SECOND WAS TO ORGANIZE AN EFFECTIVE YOUTH MOVEMENT. THIS WAS ALSO DONE WELL. THE COALITION PARTIES, MEANWHILE, WERE IGNORING SUCH THINGS. FINALLY, THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF WAS TO BE RUN UNDER RIGOUOUS AND CENTRALIZED DISCIPLINE, A NEW CONCEPT IN IRISH POLITICS. EVERYTHING WAS TO BE BASED ON A CAREFULLY WORKED-OUT QUOTE MANIFESTO UNQUOTE WHICH OFFERED A SIMPLE BUT FEASIBLE PROGRAM FOR SOLVING THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE AVERAGE MAN. FOR INSTANCE PROPERTY TAXES (RATES) WERE TO BE ABOLISHED. NORTHERN IRELAND WAS NOT TO BE MENTIONED, EVEN UNDER SEVERE PROVOCATION (WHICH WAS HEAVY AT THE END, PARTICULARLY FROM CONON CRUISE-O'BRIEN). EXCEPT FOR HAMMERING HOME THE PRINCIPAL ECONOMIC ISSUES, OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES WERE TO BE AVOIDED. THE PRINCIPAL INNOVATION WAS TO RUN AN AMERICAN-STYLE CAMPAIGN CENTRALIZED ON THE FIGURE OF JACK LYNCH, WITH LOTS OF CAMPAIGN GIMMICKRY, SUCH AS T-SHIRTS, POP SONGS, AND HEAVY ADVERTIZING. THE LOCAL CANDIDATES, BY-AND-LARGE, WERE TO COME IN ON LYNCH'S COATTAILS. LYNCH HIMSELF COVERED OVER 10,000 MILES DURING THE SHORT CAMPAIGN, A REMARKABLE FEAT OF ENDURANCE. BRENNAN, INCIDENTALLY, LEARNED THESE TECHNIQUES DURING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AN EXTENDED US VISIT UNDER THE IV PROGRAM. THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE WORRY THAT CHARLEY HAUGHEY, STILL VULNERABLE AS "SOFT" ON THE IRA SINCE THE 1970 GUN-RUNNING EPISODE, WOULD BE A LIABILITY, THOUGH HE WAS A PROVEN VOTE GETTER. THE ANSWER WAS TO KEEP HIM OFF THE NATIONAL SCENE AND JUST IN HIS OWN CONSTITUENCY, WHERE HE ROLLED UP A HANDSOME VOTE. ANOTHER IMPORTANT INNOVATION WAS THE JAMMING THROUGH BY PERSUASION AND COERCION OF A NUMBER OF ATTRACTIVE CANDIDATES WHO WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN NOMINATED UNDER THE TRADITIONAL SMOKE-FILLED ROOM PROCESS. A TYPICAL EXAMPLE IS YOUNG (22), FAIRLY INTELLIGENT SILE DE VALERA, GRAND-DAUGHTER OF EAMON, WHO WON A SEAT EASILY. THERE WERE OTHER FINE POINTS OF TECHNIQUE: MEFSOPHISTICATED COMMUNICATIONS, USE OF COMPUTERS, GREATER

USE OF ATTITUDE SURVEYS, AND PLAIN HARD WORK BY AN ARMY
OF VOLUNTEERS. IRELAND HAS NEVER SEEN SUCH A CAMPAIGN,
BUT THEY ARE LIKELY TO BE COMMON IN THE FUTURE SINCE
THIS ONE APPEARS TO HAVE WORKED. RENDAHL

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